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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001382

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS "NO CHANGE IN FOREIGN POLICY"; LINKS FORMER PM TO CORRUPTION

REF: A) RANGOON 1322 B) RANGOON 1345 C) RANGOON 1370

Classified By: COM CARMEN MARTINEZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

1.(U) Summary: On October 21, the new Foreign Minister, U Nyan Win, briefed the Rangoon diplomatic corps for the first time. The FonMin characterized the many recent cabinet shuffles as "normal" and said the changes were made to "assure success of the seven-step democratization process" and that efforts to have the ethnic groups "return to the legal fold" would continue. The FonMin made specific charges that former PM Khin Nyunt was linked to extensive (over 30 million USD) corruption. End Summary.

2. (C) On very short notice on October 21, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) called in all Rangoon heads of mission for a briefing by the new Foreign Minister, U Nyan Win. This was the FonMin's debut for the local diplomatic corps, as he has remained a relatively unknown quantity since taking office on September 19 (see Ref A). The FonMin provide an informative and useful briefing, in good English with no interpreter, and with minimal reference to notes. He earned passing marks from an audience accustomed to GOB briefings which either bore or bewildered.

3. (U) The FonMin repeated the October 19 GOB statement (Ref C) that "the Prime Minister had been permitted to retire for health reasons" and added that the former PM was in his residence with his family (regime-speak for house arrest). The FonMin characterized the many cabinet and SPDC shuffles over the past month as "normal" and said it was "time to pass the baton to a new generation" as "times call for a change." He also reiterated the message he gave the COM on October 5 (see Ref A) when he told the assembled diplomats that there would be "no change in foreign policy or domestic priorities."

4. (U) He answered questions that were uppermost in the minds of the audience by stating that "the decision to undertake the seven-step road map was not an individual decision but a decision of the SPDC," that the retirement of Khin Nyunt "will not affect it," and that the changes in the government were made to "assure success of seven-step democratization process." The FonMin used standard regime phraseology when he said that efforts will continue to have the ethnic groups "return to the legal fold." He went on to say that the nation must "close gaps among the races."

5. (C) The most surprising moment came when the FonMin made specific charges that the former PM (chief of military intelligence - MI) was linked to a specific corruption scheme to the tune of 30 billion kyat (over 30 million USD). The FonMin made detailed reference to a September clash on the Burma-China border (see Ref B) between the Burmese Army and the NaSaKa (an interagency unit that includes MI, customs, and immigration elements). The Foreign Minister said that Prime Minister Khin Nyunt "must bear responsibility for those under him." This is the regime's first official statement alleging corruption on the part of Khin Nyunt and MI.

6. (C) Comment: The FonMin's message that there would be no change in either foreign or domestic policies was not unexpected. However, given Khin Nyunt's fall from grace, one would expect that even if the ideas contained in the "seven step road map" (which has always been considered Khin Nyunt's creation) were retained, the "road map" would have been renamed and relaunched as a new product of the new PM and company. Instead, it seems the regime is content to use a road map that can only lead Burma on a never-ending journey towards a democratic future that seems ever more distant. End Comment.

Martinez